

Responding to Suspected Fentanyl or Other Opioids in Jails: It's Safe to Assist

Precautions to stay safe if you suspect fentanyl or other opioids are present

The risk of overdose from touching or being near opioids, including fentanyl, is **extremely low**.

To make the risk even lower:

- Wear standard nitrile gloves for extra protection.
- If you come into contact with an unknown substance, brush or wash off the residue with soap and water.
- Do not use alcohol hand sanitizer. It will not remove the substance and may increase absorption.
- Do not perform actions that will cause substances to become airborne.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth after touching any surface that may be contaminated, even if wearing gloves.



To date there are **no clinically confirmed cases** of officers or other first responders overdosing from touching or simply being around fentanyl.

What does a fentanyl or other opioid overdose look like?

There are a number of videos that show officers on a scene “overdosing” from suspected fentanyl exposure.

The behaviors officers exhibit in these videos do not match signs of an opioid overdose.

✓ Opioid overdose

- Unresponsive
- No/slow breathing
- Gurgling noise from mouth
- Blue or gray skin, lips, or nails
- Won't wake to stimuli like sternal rub

✗ NOT opioid overdose

- Anxious
- Rapid breathing
- Increased heart rate
- Sweating and/or dizziness
- Can talk
- Can self-administer naloxone



Watch for clusters of fentanyl overdoses: one overdose may mean more fentanyl is in the facility and additional overdoses could happen.

Quick facts

- **You can't overdose by simply touching fentanyl** or drugs that contain fentanyl. Fentanyl does not absorb well through the skin, unless there are other chemicals present to help absorption.
- Prescription fentanyl patches, for example, combine fentanyl with a chemical that aids absorption, and it still takes hours of close contact with the patch to absorb fentanyl through the skin.
- Healthcare providers, laboratory personnel, and patients regularly handle fentanyl and do not overdose.
- Someone who has ingested, injected, or snorted the fentanyl does not exhale enough fentanyl to cause overdose in first responders.
- Second-hand exposure to fentanyl smoke is not a significant concern.



Thank you to our partners. Developed by the UW Addictions, Drug & Alcohol Institute.

What to do for a fentanyl or other opioid overdose

The response for fentanyl overdose is the same as other opioids. **Follow your facility's protocol** for opioid overdose response, including calling medical immediately.

- 1** Check for responsiveness: gently shake, do a sternal rub.
- 2** Give 1 dose of naloxone (also known as Narcan®). Naloxone takes a few minutes to take effect, so don't expect an immediate response.
- 3** Start chest compressions if there is no heartbeat. Support their breathing if they are not breathing or not breathing well. Opioids affect a person's ability to breathe — helping them breathe is important.
- 4** If they do not start breathing on their own in 2-3 minutes, give an additional dose of naloxone.
- 5** Continue chest compressions and/or breathing support until medical backup arrives or they start breathing on their own.
- 6** If they are breathing and you have to leave them alone, roll them into the recovery position.
- 7** When they wake up, tell them what has happened. They may feel anxious or unwell. Let them know the effects of naloxone will wear off in 30-90 minutes. Stay with them until medical arrives.

Naloxone works on fentanyl and other opioids.



- It may take more than one dose to reverse an overdose.
- **Don't give several doses at the same time.** Naloxone takes a few minutes to take effect. If they do not start breathing on their own in 2-3 minutes, give an additional dose of naloxone.

Unnecessary PPE preparation can delay life-saving treatment.

- Wear standard nitrile gloves for extra protection.
- Wear an N95 or P100 respirator if there is visible powder in the air.
- Wipe any visible powder residue off lips prior to rescue breathing. Use a CPR mask, shield, or bag-valve mask, if available.

Learn more

If you have concerns about a potential drug exposure or poisoning, call your local **Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.**

If you are interested in WA statewide trends and other fentanyl facts, visit: stopoverdose.org/basics/fentanyl